

FRENCH INDOCHINA

One writer walking through an Annamite cemetery on
All Saints' Day
questioned a child whom he found there. The
astonishing response was
made in pidgin French:

Pas P&ole aujourd'hui . . . moi meme **chose**
fransais, moi gratter papa.¹

For those Annamites who adopt bourgeois lives
unflinching through
parvenu snobbery, many more have selected certain
French customs,
including the language, but modified them almost
beyond recognition. The Annamite, with his diverse mental set-up,
cannot grasp the
ideas behind Western culture, despite assirniktionist
dreams, and what
he takes over purely externally, he necessarily distorts.
Many customs
are definitely antipathetic or comical to them. The
soldiers who used
to fondle native babies were not considered genial
fellows but ogres who
lived on a diet of children. Their feeling for the dead
gives the Anna-
mites a profound horror of surgery. Doctors have the
greatest difficulty
in persuading native women to submit to medical
examinations. In
general, it may be said that the Annamite has adopted
what appealed
to his vanity or what did not run counter to his
traditions. The Anna-
mites* insistence upon treatment finely graded to his
rank and that of
his interlocutor has been a great obstacle. If the
Frenchman treats him
unjustly as an inferior, he is insulted beyond repair;
but if the snub is
unconscious he disregards the intention and considers
it a deliberate
injury. The Annamite envoys at Paris noted with
incredible minutiae
the quantity and quality of deference shown them, yet
they could not
understand French decorum which imposed silence
as a mark of
respect upon the funeral procession of Thanh Thai's
mother. The
obvious sterility of this preoccupation with hierarchic

observance does not prevent its playing an important role in Franco-Annamite relations*

So striking are the temperamental resemblances, that one English traveler in Indo-China called the Annamites the French of the Far East. Le Myre de Vilers also pointed out this similarity. Both are, as a people, brave* industrious, intelligent, gay, ironic, *frondew*> desirous to be and to be functionaries.² Unfortunately the resemblance is more **as** regards defects. The peasants, in particular, are alike in addition to craft and avarice, and feel the same need for living in **dirt discomfort**. Perhaps their very similarity makes for friction, but likely it *m* a different evaluation of their mutual qualities. To **the** Aimamife, RffiapeaQ virtues are tenacity, initiative, *smgfrmd**

¹ J., *La* <fe 1909), p. 26.

* Le de *de Iff* (Paris, **1908**), p. 36.